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MARCH

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22

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Weekly Journal

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PART 124

PRICE
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1879

LONDON

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STRAND.
W.C.

Nos.
535-539.

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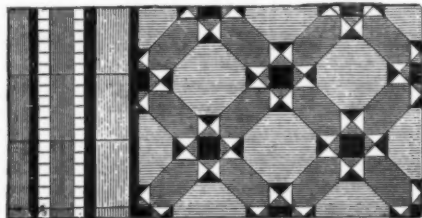
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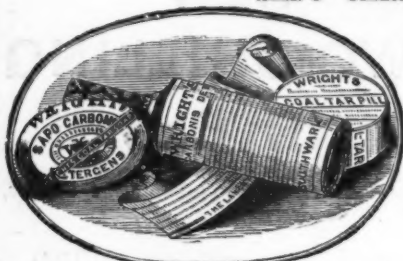
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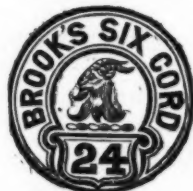
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SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 1879.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

VIXEN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," &c. &c.

CHAPTER XXVIII. "FADING IN MUSIC."

"MRS. WINSTANLEY, on her marriage, by the Duchess of Dovedale."

That was the sentence which went on repeating itself like a cabalistic formula in Pamela Winstanley's mind, as her carriage drove through the dark silent woods to Ashbourne on the last night of the year.

A small idea had taken possession of her small mind. The duchess was the fittest person to present her to her gracious mistress, or her gracious mistress's representative, at the first drawing-room of the coming season. Mrs. Winstanley had old friends, friends who had known her in her girlhood, who would have been happy to undertake the office. Captain Winstanley had an ancient female relative, living in a fossil state at Hampton Court, and vaguely spoken of as "a connection," who would willingly emerge from her aristocratic hermitage to present her kinsman's bride to her sovereign, and whom the captain deemed the proper sponsor for his wife on that solemn occasion. But what value had a fossilised Lady Susan Winstanley, of whom an outside world knew nothing, when weighed in the balance with the Duchess of Dovedale? No; Mrs. Winstanley felt that to be presented by the duchess was the one thing needful to her happiness.

It was a dinner of thirty people; quite a state dinner. The most splendid of the orchids had been brought out of their houses, and the dinner-table looked like a tropical forest in little. Vixen went into

dinner with Lord Ellangowan, which was an unappreciated honour, as that nobleman had very little to say for himself, except under extreme pressure, and in his normal state could only smile and look good-natured. Roderick Vawdrey was ever so far away, between his betrothed and an enormous dowager in sky-blue velvet and diamonds.

After dinner there was music. Lady Mabel played a dreary minor melody, chiefly remarkable for its delicate modulation from sharps to flats and back again. A large gentleman sang an Italian buffo song, at which the company smiled tepidly; a small young lady sighed and languished through *Non e ver*; and then Miss Tempest and Lord Mallow sang a duet.

This was the success of the evening. They were asked to sing again and again. They were allowed to monopolise the piano; and before the evening was over everyone had decided that Lord Mallow and Miss Tempest were engaged. Only the voices of plighted lovers could be expected to harmonise as well as that.

"They must have sung very often together," said the duchess to Mrs. Winstanley.

"Only within the last fortnight. Lord Mallow never stayed with us before, you know. He is my husband's friend. They were brother officers, and have known each other a long time. Lord Mallow insists upon Violet singing every evening. He is passionately fond of music."

"Very pleasant," murmured the duchess approvingly: and then she glided on to shed the sunshine of her presence upon another group of guests.

Carriages began to be announced at eleven—that is to say, about half an hour after the gentlemen had left the dining-

room—but the duke insisted that people should stop till twelve.

"We must see the old year out," he said. "It is a lovely night. We can go out on the terrace, and hear the Ringwood bells."

This is how Violet and Lord Mallow happened to sing so many duets. There was plenty of time for music during the hour before midnight. After the singing, a rash young gentleman, pining to distinguish himself somehow—a young man with a pimply complexion, who had said with Don Carlos, "Three-and-twenty years of age, and nothing done for immortality"—recited Tennyson's Farewell to the Old Year, in a voice which was like anything but a trumpet, and with gesticulations painfully suggestive of Saint Vitus.

The long suite of rooms terminated in an orangery, a substantial stone building with tessellated pavement, and wide windows opening on the terrace. The night was wondrously mild, the full moon raining down her light upon the dark Forest, the shining water-pools, the distant blackness of a group of ancient yew-trees on the crest of a hill. Ashbourne stood high, and the view from the terrace was at all times magnificent, but perhaps finest of all in the moonlight.

The younger guests wandered softly in and out of the rooms, and looked at the golden oranges glimmering against their dark leaves, and put themselves into positions that suggested the possibility of flirtation. Young ladies, whose study of German literature had never gone beyond Ollendorff, gazed pensively at the oranges, and murmured the song of Mignon. Couples of maturer growth whispered the details of unsavoury scandals behind perfumed fans.

Vixen and Rorie were among these roving couples. Violet had left the piano, and Roderick was off duty. Lady Mabel and Lord Mallow were deep in the wrongs of Ireland. Captain Winstanley was talking agriculture with the duke, whose mind was sorely exercised about guano.

"My dear sir, in a few years we shall have used up all the guano, and then what can become of us?" demanded the duke. "Talk about our exhausting our coal! What is that compared with the exhaustion of guano? We may learn to exist without fires. Our winters are becoming milder; our young men are going in for athletics; they can keep themselves warm upon bicycles. And then we have the gigantic coal-fields of America, the vast basin of the Mississippi to fall back upon, with ever-increasing facilities in the mode of

transport. But civilisation must come to a deadlock when we have no more guano. Our grass, our turnips, our mangel, must deteriorate. We shall have no more prize cattle. It is too awful to contemplate."

"But do you really consider such a contingency at all probable, duke?" asked the captain.

"Probable, sir? It is inevitable. In 1868 the Chincha Islands were estimated to contain about six million tons of guano. The rate of exportation had at that time risen to four hundred thousand tons per annum. At this rate the three islands will be completely exhausted by the year 1888, and England will have to exist without guano. The glory of the English people, as breeders of prize oxen, will have departed."

"Chemistry will have discovered new fertilisers by that time," suggested the captain, in a comforting tone.

"Sir," replied the duke severely, "the discoveries of modern science tend to the chimerical rather than the practical. Your modern scientists can liquefy oxygen, they can light a city with an electric battery, but they cannot give me anything to increase the size and succulence of my turnips. Virgil knew as much about agriculture as your modern chemist."

While the duke was holding forth about guano, Vixen and Rorie were on the terrace, in the stillness and moonlight. There was hardly a breath of wind. It might have been a summer evening. Vixen was shrouded from head to foot in a white cloak which Rorie had fetched from the room where the ladies had left their wraps. She looked all white and solemn in the moonlight, like a sheeted ghost.

Although Mr. Vawdrey had been civil enough to go in quest of her cloak, and had seemed especially desirous of bringing her to the terrace, he was by no means delightful now he had got her there. They took a turn or two in silence, broken only by a brief remark about the beauty of the night and the extent of the prospect.

"I think it is the finest view in the Forest," said Vixen, dwelling on the subject for lack of anything else to say. "You must be very fond of Ashbourne."

"I don't exactly recognise the necessity. The view is superb, no doubt; but the house is frightfully commonplace. It is a little better than Briarwood. That is about all which an enthusiastic admirer could advance in its favour. How much longer does Lord Mallow mean to take up his abode with you?"

Vixen shrugged her cloaked shoulders with an action that seemed to express contemptuous carelessness.

"I haven't the least idea. That is no business of mine, you know."

"I don't know anything of the kind," retorted Rorie captiously. "I should have thought it was very much your business."

"Should you really?" said Vixen mockingly.

If the gentleman's temper was execrable, the lady's mood was not too amiable.

"Yes. Are not you the lodestar? It is your presence that makes the Abbey House pleasant to him. Who can wonder that he protracts his stay?"

"He has been with us a little more than a fortnight."

"He has been with you an age. Mortals who are taken up to Paradise seldom stay so long. Sweet dreams are not so long. A fortnight in the same house with you, meeting with you at breakfast, parting with you at midnight, seeing you at noon-tide and afternoon, walking with you, riding with you, singing with you, kneeling down to family prayer at your side, mixing his 'Amen' with yours; why he might as well be your husband at once. He has as much delight in your society."

"You forget the hours in which he is shooting pheasants and playing billiards."

"Glimpses of purgatory, which make his heaven all the more divine," said Rorie.

"Well, it is none of my business, as you said just now. There are people born to be happy, I suppose; creatures that come into the world under a lucky star."

"Undoubtedly, and among them notably Mr. Vawdrey, who has everything that the heart of a reasonable man can desire."

"So had Solomon, and yet he made his moan."

"Oh, there is always a crumpled rose-leaf in everybody's bed. And if the rose-leaves were all smooth, a man would crumple one on purpose, in order to have something to grumble about. Hark, Rorie!" cried Vixen, with a sudden change of tone, as the first silvery chime of the Ringwood bells came floating over the woodland distance—the low moonlit hills; "don't be cross. The old year is dying. Remember the dear days that are gone, when you and I used to think a new year a thing to be glad about. And now what can the new years bring us half so good as that which the old ones have taken away?"

She had slipped her little gloved hand through his arm, and drawn very near to

him, moved by tender thoughts of the past. He looked down at her with eyes from which all the anger had vanished. There was only love in them—deep love—love such as a very affectionate brother might perchance give his only sister; but it must be owned that brothers capable of such love are rare.

"No, child," he murmured sadly. "Years to come can bring us nothing so good or so dear as the past. Every new year will drift us farther apart."

They were standing at the end of the terrace farthest from the orangery windows, out of which the duchess and her visitors came trooping to hear the Ringwood chimes. Rorie and Vixen kept quite apart from the rest. They stood silent, arm in arm, looking across the landscape towards the winding Avon and the quiet market-town, hidden from them by intervening hills. Yonder, nestling among those grassy hills, lies Moyles Court, the good old English manor-house where noble Alice Lisle sheltered the fugitives from Sedgemoor; paying for that one act of womanly hospitality with her life. Farther away, on the banks of the Avon, is the quiet churchyard where that gentle martyr of Jeffery's lust for blood takes her long rest. The creeping spleenwort thrives amidst the grey stones of her tomb. To Vixen these things were so familiar, that it was as if she could see them with her bodily eyes as she looked across the distance, with its mysterious shadows, its patches of silver light.

The bells chimed on with their tender cadence, half joyous, half sorrowful. The shallower spirits among the guests chattered about the beauty of the night, and the sweetness of the bells. Deeper souls were silent, full of saddest thoughts. Who is there who has not lost something in the years gone by, which earth's longest future cannot restore? Only eternity can give back the ravished treasures of the dead years.

Violet's lips trembled and were dumb. Roderick saw the tears rolling down her pale cheeks, and offered no word of consolation. He knew that she was thinking of her father.

"Dear old squire," he murmured gently, at last. "How good he was to me, and how fondly I loved him."

That speech was the sweetest comfort he could have offered. Vixen gave his arm a grateful hug.

"Thank God, there is someone who remembers him besides his dogs and me,"

she exclaimed; and then she hastily dried her tears, and made herself ready to meet Lord Mallow and Lady Mabel Ashbourne, who were coming along the terrace towards them talking gaily. Lord Mallow had a much wider range of subjects than Mr. Vawdrey. He had read more, and could keep pace with Lady Mabel in her highest flights; science, literature, politics, were all as one to him. He had crammed his vigorous young mind with everything which it behoved a man panting for parliamentary distinction to know.

"Where have you two people been hiding yourselves for the last half hour?" asked Lady Mabel. "You were wanted badly just now for Blow Gentle Gales. I know you can manage the bass, Rorie, when you like."

"Lo, behold a pennant waving!" sang Rorie in deep full tones. "Yes, I can manage that at a push. You seem music mad to-night, Mabel. The old year is making a swan-like end—fading in music."

Rorie and Vixen were still standing arm-in-arm; rather too much as if they belonged to each other, Lady Mabel thought. The attitude was hardly in good taste, according to Lady Mabel's law of taste, which was a code as strict as Draco's.

The bells rang on.

"The New Year has come!" cried the duke. "Let us all shake hands in the friendly German fashion."

On this there was a general shaking of hands, which seemed to last a long time. It seemed rather as if the young people of opposite sexes shook hands with each other more than once. Lord Mallow would hardly let Violet's hand go, once having got it in his hearty grasp.

"Hail to the first new year we greet together," he said softly; "may it not be the last. I feel that it must not, cannot be the last."

"You are wiser than I, then," Vixen answered coldly; "for my feelings tell me nothing about the future—except"—and here her face beamed at him with a lovely smile—"except that you will be kind to Bullfinch."

"If I were an emperor I would make him a consul," answered the Irishman.

He had contrived to separate Roderick and Vixen. The young man had returned to his allegiance, and was escorting Lady Mabel back to the house. Everybody began to feel chilly now that the bells were silent, and there was a general hurrying off to the carriages, which were

standing in an oval ring round a group of deodoras in front of the porch on the other side of the house.

Rorie and Vixen met no more that night. Lord Mallow took her to her carriage, and sat opposite her and talked to her during the homeward drive. Captain Winstanley was smoking a cigar on the box. His wife slumbered peacefully.

"I think I may be satisfied with Theodore," she said, as she composed herself for sleep; "my dress was not quite the worst in the room, was it, Violet?"

"It was lovely, mamma. You can make yourself quite happy," answered Vixen truthfully; whereupon the matron breathed a gentle sigh of content, and lapsed into slumber.

They had the Boldrewood Road before them, a long hilly road cleaving the very heart of the forest, a road full of ghosts at the best of times, but offering a Walpurgis revel of phantoms on such a night as this to the eye of the belated wanderer. How ghostly the deer were, as they skimmed across the road and flitted away into dim distances, mixing with and melting into the shadows of the trees! The little grey rabbits, sitting up on end, were like circles of hobgoblins that dispersed and vanished at the approach of mortals. The leafless old hawthorns, rugged and crooked, silvered by the moonlight, were most ghostlike of all. They took every form, from the most unearthly to the most grotesquely human.

Violet sat wrapped in her furred white mantle, watching the road as intently as if she had never seen it before. She never could grow tired of these things. She loved them with a love which was part of her nature.

"What a delightful evening, was it not?" asked Lord Mallow.

"I suppose it was very nice," answered Violet coolly; "but I have no standard of comparison. It was my first dinner at Ashbourne."

"What a remarkably clever girl Lady Mabel is. Mr. Vawdrey ought to consider himself extremely fortunate."

"I have never heard him say that he does not so consider himself."

"Naturally. But I think he might be a little more enthusiastic. He is the coolest lover I ever saw."

"Perhaps you judge him by comparison with Irish lovers. Your nation is more demonstrative than ours."

"Oh, an Irish girl would cashier such a

fellow as Mr. Vawdrey. But I may possibly misjudge him. You ought to know more about him than I. You have known him——"

"All my life," said Violet simply. "I know that he is good and staunch and true, that he honoured his mother, and that he will make Lady Mabel Ashbourne a very good husband. Perhaps, if she were a little less clever and a little more human, he might be happier with her, but no doubt that will all come right in time."

"Anyway it will be all the same in a century or so," assented Lord Mallow. "We are going to have lovely weather as long as this moon lasts, I believe. Will you go for a long ride to-morrow—like that forest ride?"

"When I took you all over the world for sport?" said Vixen laughing. "I wonder you are inclined to trust me after that. If Captain Winstanley likes I don't mind being your guide again to-morrow."

"Captain Winstanley shall like. I'll answer for that. I would make his life unendurable if he were to refuse."

CHAPTER XXIX. CRYING FOR THE MOON.

DESPITE the glorious moonlight night which ushered in the new-born year, the first day of that year was abominable; a day of hopeless, incessant rain, falling from a leaden sky in which there was never a break, not a stray gleam of sunshine from morn till eve.

"The new year is like Shakespeare's Richard," said Lord Mallow, when he stood in the porch after breakfast, surveying the horizon. "'Tetchy and wayward was his infancy.' I never experienced anything so provoking. I was dreaming all night of our ride."

"Were you not afraid of being like that dreadful man in Locksley Hall?"

"Like a dog, he hunts in dreams,"

asked Vixen mockingly.

She was standing on the threshold, playing with Argus, looking the picture of healthful beauty in her dark green cloth dress and plain linen collar. All Vixen's morning costumes were of the simplest and neatest; a compact style of dress which interfered with none of her rural amusements. She could romp with her dog, make her round of the stables, work in the garden, ramble in the Forest, without fear of dilapidated flounces or dishevelled laces and ribbons.

"Violet's morning-dresses are so dreadfully strong-minded," complained Mrs.

Winstanley. "One would almost think to look at her that she was the kind of girl to go round the country lecturing upon woman's rights."

"No ride this morning," said Captain Winstanley, coming into the hall with a bundle of letters in his hand. "I shall go to my den, and do a morning's letter-writing and accountancy—unless you want me for a shy at the pheasants, Mallow?"

"Let the pheasants be at rest for the first day of the year," answered Lord Mallow. "I am sure you would rather be fetching up your arrears of correspondence than shooting at dejected birds in a plantation; and I am luxurious enough to prefer staying indoors, if the ladies will have me. I can help Miss Tempest to wind her wools."

"Thanks, but I never do any wool-work. Mamma is the artist in that line."

"Then I place myself unreservedly at Mrs. Winstanley's feet."

"You are too good," sighed the fair matron, from her armchair by the hearth; "but I shall not touch my crewels to-day. I have one of my nervous headaches. It is a penalty I too often have to pay for the pleasures of society. I'm afraid I shall have to lie down for an hour or two."

And with a languid sigh Mrs. Winstanley wrapped her China crape shawl round her, and went slowly upstairs, leaving Violet and Lord Mallow in sole possession of the great oak-panelled hall; the lady looking at the rain from her favourite perch in the deep window-seat, the gentleman contemplating the same prospect from the open door. It was one of those mild winter mornings when a huge wood fire is a cheerful feature in the scene, but hardly essential to comfort.

Vixen thought of that long rainy day years ago, the day on which Roderick Vawdrey came of age. How well she remembered sitting in that very window, watching the ceaseless rain, with a chilly sense of having been forgotten and neglected by her old companion. And then, in the gloaming, just when she had lost all hope of seeing him, he had come leaping in out of the wet night, like a lion from his lair, and had taken her in his arms and kissed her before she knew what he was doing.

Her cheeks crimsoned even to-day at the memory of that kiss. It had seemed a small thing then. Now it seemed awful—a burning spot of shame upon the whiteness of her youth.

"He must have thought I was very

fond of him, or he would not have dared to treat me so," she told herself. "But then we had been playfellows so long. I had teased him, and he had plagued me; and we had been really like brother and sister. Poor Rorie! If we could have always been young we should have been better friends."

"How thoughtful you seem this morning, Miss Tempest," said a voice behind Vixen's shoulder.

"Do I?" she asked, turning quickly round. "New Year's Day is a time to make one thoughtful. It is like beginning a new chapter in the volume of life, and one cannot help speculating as to what the chapter is to be about."

"For you it ought to be a story full of happiness."

"Ah, but you don't know my history. I had such a happy childhood. I drained my cup of bliss before I was a woman; and there is nothing left for me but the dregs, and they—they are dust and ashes."

There was an intensity of bitterness in her tone that moved him beyond his power of self-control. That she—so fair, so lovely, so deeply dear to him already; she for whom life should be one summer-day of unclouded gladness; that she should give expression to a rooted sorrow was more than his patience could bear.

"Violet, you must not speak thus; you wound me to the heart. Oh, my love, my love, you were born to be the giver of gladness, the centre of joy and delight. Grief should never touch you; sorrow and pain should never come near you. You are a creature of happiness and light."

"Don't," cried Vixen vehemently. "Oh, pray don't. It is all vain—useless. My life is marked out for me. No one can alter it. Pray do not lower yourself by one word more. You will be sorry—angry with yourself and me—afterwards."

"Violet, I must speak."

"To what end? My fate is as fixed as the stars. No one can change it."

"No mortal perhaps, Violet. But love can. Love is a god. Oh, my darling, I have learnt to love you dearly and fondly in this little while, and I mean to win you. It shall go hard with me if I do not succeed. Dear love, if truth and constancy can conquer fate, I ought to be able to win you. There is no one else, is there, Violet?" he asked falteringly, with his eyes upon her downcast face.

A burning spot glowed and faded in her cheek before she answered him.

"Can you not see how empty my life is?" she asked with a bitter laugh. "No; there is no one else; I stand quite alone. Death took my father from me; your friend has robbed me of my mother. My old playfellow, Roderick Vawdrey, belongs to his cousin. I belong to nobody."

"Let me have you then, Violet. Ah, if you knew how I would cherish you. You should be loved so well that you would fancy yourself the centre of the universe, and that all the planets revolved in the skies only to please you. Love, let me have you—priceless treasure that others know not how to value. Let me keep and guard you."

"I would not wrong you so much as to marry you without loving you, and I shall never love any more," said Vixen, with a sad steadfastness that was more dispiriting than the most vehement protestation.

"Why not?"

"Because I spent all my store of love while I was a child. I loved my father—ah, I cannot tell you how fondly. I do not think there are many fathers who are loved as he was. I poured out all my treasures at his feet. I have no love left for a husband."

"What, Violet, not if your old friend Roderick Vawdrey were pleading?" asked Lord Mallow.

It was an unlucky speech. If Lord Mallow had had a chance, which he had not, that speech would have spoiled it. Violet started to her feet, her cheeks crimson, her eyes flashing.

"It is shameful, abominable of you to say such a thing," she cried, her voice tremulous with indignation. "I will never forgive you for that dastardly speech. Come, Argus."

She had mounted the broad oak stairs with light swift foot before Lord Mallow could apologise. He was terribly crestfallen.

"I was a brute," he muttered to himself.

"But I hit the bull's-eye. It is that fellow she loves. Hard upon me, when I ask for nothing but to be her slave and adore her all the days of my life. And I know that Winstanley would have been pleased. How lovely she looked when she was angry—her tawny hair gleaming in the firelight, her great brown eyes flashing. Yes, it's the Hampshire squire she cares for, and I'm out of it. I'll go and shoot the pheasants," concluded Lord Mallow savagely; "those beggars shall not have it all their own way to-day."

He went off to get his gun, in the worst

humour he had ever been in since he was a child and cried for the moon.

He spent the whole day in a young oak plantation, ankle deep in oozy mud, moss, and dead fern, making havoc among the innocent birds. He was in so bloodthirsty a temper, that he felt as if he could have shot a covey of young children, had they come in his way, with all the ferocity of a modern Herod.

"I think I've spoiled Winstanley's covers for this year, at any rate," he said to himself, as he tramped homewards in the early darkness, with no small hazard of losing himself in one of those ghostly plantations, which were all exactly alike, and in which a man might walk all day long without meeting anything more human than a trespassing forest pony that had leapt a fence in quest of more sufficing food than the scanty herbage of the open woods.

Lord Mallow got on better than might have been expected. He went east when he ought to have gone west, and found himself in Queen's Bower when he fancied himself in Gretnam Wood; but he did not walk more than half-a-dozen miles out of his way, and he got home somehow at last, which was much for a stranger to the ground.

The stable clock was chiming the quarter before six when he went into the hall, where Vixen had left him in anger that morning. The great wood fire was burning gaily, and Captain Winstanley was sitting in a Glastonbury chair in front of it.

"Went for the birds after all, old fellow," he said, without looking round, recognising the tread of Lord Mallow's shooting-boots. "You found it too dismal in the house, I suppose? Consistently abominable weather, isn't it? You must be soaked to the skin."

"I suppose I am," answered the other carelessly. "But I've been soaked a good many times before, and it hasn't done me much harm. Thanks to the modern inventions of the waterproof-makers, the soaking begins inside instead of out. I should call myself parboiled."

"Take off your oilskins and come and talk. You'll have a nip, won't you?" added Captain Winstanley, ringing the bell. "Kirschenwasser, curaçoa, Glenlivat—which shall it be?"

"Glenlivat," answered Lord Mallow, "and plenty of it. I'm in the humour in which a man must either drink inordinately or cut his throat."

"Were the birds unapproachable?" asked Captain Winstanley, laughing; "or were the dogs troublesome?"

"Birds and dogs were perfect; but— Well, I suppose I'd better make a clean breast of it. I've had a capital time here— Oh, here comes the whisky. Hold your hand, old fellow!" cried Lord Mallow, as his host poured the Glenlivat somewhat recklessly into a soda-water tumbler. "You mustn't take me too literally. Just moisten the bottom of the glass with whisky before you put in the soda. That's as much as I care about."

"All right. You were saying—"

"That my visit here has been simply delightful, and that I must go to London by an early train to-morrow."

"Paradoxical!" said the captain. "That sounds like your well-bred servant, who tells you that he has nothing to say against the situation, but he wishes to leave you at the end of his month. What's the matter, dear boy? Do you find our Forest hermitage too dull?"

"I should ask nothing kinder from Fate than to be allowed to spend my days in your Forest. Yes; I would say good-bye to the green hills and vales of County Cork, and become that detestable being, an absentee, if—if—Fortune smiled on me. But she doesn't, you see, and I must go. Perhaps you may have perceived, Winstanley—perhaps you may not have been altogether averse to the idea—in a word, I have fallen over head and ears in love with your bewitching step-daughter."

"My dear fellow, I'm delighted. It is the thing I would have wished, had I been bold enough to wish for anything so good. And of course Violet is charmed. You are the very man for her."

"Am I? So I thought myself till this morning. Unfortunately the young lady is of a different opinion. She has refused me."

"Refused you! Pahaw, they all begin that way. It's one of the small diplomacies of the sex. They think they enhance their value by an assumed reluctance. Nonsense, man, try again. She can't help liking you."

"I would try again, every day for a twelve-month, if there were a scintilla of hope. My life should be a series of offers. But the thing is decided. I know from her manner, from her face, that I have no chance. I have been in the habit of thinking myself rather a nice kind of fellow, and the women have encouraged the idea. But I don't answer here, Winstanley. Miss Tempest will have nothing to say to me."

"She's a fool," said Captain Winstanley, with his teeth set, and that dark look of his which meant harm to somebody. "I'll talk to her."

"My dear Winstanley, understand I'll have no coercion. If I win her, I must do it off my own bat. Dearly as I love her, if you were to bring her to me conquered and submissive, like Iphigenia at the altar, I would not have her. I love her much too well to ask any sacrifice of inclination from her. I love her too well to accept anything less than her free unfettered heart. She cannot give me that, and I must go. I had much rather you should say nothing about me, either to her or her mother."

"But I shall say a great deal to both," exclaimed the captain, desperately angry. "I am indignant. I am outraged by her conduct. What in Heaven's name does this wilful girl want in a husband? You have youth, good looks, good temper, talent, tastes that harmonise with her own. You can give her a finer position than she has any right to expect. And she refuses you. She is a spoiled child, who doesn't know her own mind or her own advantage. She has a diabolical temper, and is as wild as a hawk. Egad, I congratulate you on your escape, Mallow. She was not born to make any man happy."

"Small thanks for your congratulations," retorted the Irishman. "She might have made me happy if she had chosen. I would have forgiven her tempers, and loved her for her wildness. She is the sweetest woman I ever knew; as fresh and fair as your furzy hill-tops. But she is not for me. Fate never meant me to be so blessed."

"She will change her mind before she is many months older," said Captain Winstanley. "Her father and mother have spoilt her. She is a creature of whims and fancies, and must be ridden on the curb."

"I would ride her with the lightest snaffle-bit that ever was made," protested Lord Mallow. "But there's no use in talking about it. You won't think me discourteous or ungrateful if I clear out of this to-morrow morning, will you, Winstanley?"

"Certainly not," answered his host; "but I shall think you a confounded ass. Why not wait and try your luck again?"

"Simply because I know it would be useless. Truth and candour shine in that girl's eyes. She has a soul above the petty trickeries of her sex. No from her lips means No, between this and eternity.

Oh, thrice blessed will that man be to whom she answers Yes; for she will give him the tenderest, truest, most generous heart in creation."

"You answer boldly for her on so short an acquaintance."

"I answer as a man who loves her, and who has looked into her soul," replied Lord Mallow. "You and she don't hit it over well, I fancy."

"No. We began by disliking each other, and we have been wonderfully constant to our first opinions."

"I can't understand——"

"Can't you? You will, perhaps, some day: if you ever have a handsome step-daughter who sets up her back against you from the beginning of things. Have you ever seen a sleek handsome tabby put herself on the defensive at the approach of a terrier, her back arched, her eyes flashing green lightnings, her tail lashing itself, her whiskers bristling? That's my step-daughter's attitude towards me, and I daresay before long I shall feel her claws. There goes the gong, and we must go too. I'm sorry Miss Tempest has been such a fool, Mallow; but I must repeat my congratulations, even at the risk of offending you."

There were no duets that evening. Vixen was as cold as ice, and as silent as a statue. She sat in the shadow of her mother's arm-chair after dinner, turning over the leaves of Doré's Tennyson, pausing to contemplate Elaine with a half-contemptuous pity—a curious feeling that hurt her like a physical pain.

"Poor wretch!" she mused. "Are there women in our days so weak as to love where they can never be loved again, I wonder? It is foolish enough in a man; but he cures himself as quickly as the mungoose that gets bitten by a snake, and runs away to find the herb which is an antidote to the venom, and comes back ready to fight the snake again."

"Are we not going to have any music?" asked Mrs. Winstanley languidly, more interested in the picots her clever needle was executing on a piece of Italian point than in the reply. "Lord Mallow, cannot you persuade Violet to join you in one of those sweet duets of Mendelssohn's?"

"Indeed, mamma, I couldn't sing a note. I'm as husky as a raven."

"I'm not surprised to hear it," said the captain, looking up from his study of the Gardener's Chronicle. "No doubt you managed to catch cold last night, while

you were mooning upon the terrace with young Vawdrey."

"How very incautious of you, Violet," exclaimed Mrs. Winstanley in her complaining tone.

"I was not cold, mamma; I had my warm cloak."

"But you confess you have caught cold. I detest colds; they always go through a house. I shall be the next victim, I dare say; and with me a cold is martyrdom. I'm afraid you must find us very dull, Lord Mallow, for New Year's Day, when people expect to be lively. We ought to have had a dinner-party."

"My dear Mrs. Winstanley, I don't care a straw about New Year's Day, and I am not in a lively vein. This quiet evening suits me much better than high jinks, I assure you."

"It's very good of you to say so."

"Come and play a game of billiards," said Captain Winstanley, throwing down his paper.

"Upon my honour I'd rather sit by the fire and watch Mrs. Winstanley at her point-lace. I'm in an abominably lazy mood after my tramp in those soppy plantations," answered Lord Mallow, who felt a foolish pleasure—mingled with bitterest regrets—in being in the same room with the girl he loved.

She was hidden from him in her shadowy corner; shrouded on one side by the velvet drapery of the fireplace, on the other by her mother's chair. He could only catch a glimpse of her auburn plaits now and then as her head bent over her open book. He never heard her voice, or met her eyes. And yet it was sweet to him to sit in the same room with her.

"Come, Mallow, you can sing us something, at any rate," said the captain, suppressing a yawn. "I know you can play your own accompaniment when you please. You can't be too idle to give us one of Moore's melodies."

"I'll sing if you like, Mrs. Winstanley," assented Lord Mallow; "but I'm afraid you must be tired of my songs. My repertoire is rather limited."

"Your songs are charming," said Mrs. Winstanley.

The Irishman seated himself at the distant piano, struck a chord or two, and began the old old melody, with its familiar refrain:

Oh, there's nothing half so sweet in life
As love's young dream.

Before his song was finished Violet had kissed her mother, and glided silently from

the room. Lord Mallow saw her go; and there was a sudden break in his voice as the door closed upon her—a break that sounded almost like a suppressed sob.

When Vixen came down to breakfast next morning she found the table laid only for three.

"What has become of Lord Mallow?" she asked Forbes, when he brought in the urn.

"He left by an early train, ma'am. Captain Winstanley drove him to Lyndhurst."

The old servants of the Abbey House had not yet brought themselves to speak of their new lord as "master." He was always "Captain Winstanley."

The captain came in while Violet knelt by the fire playing with Argus, whom even the new rule had not banished wholly from the family sitting-rooms.

The servants filed in for morning prayers, which Captain Winstanley delivered in a cold hard voice. His manual of family worship was of concise and business-like form, and the whole ceremony lasted about seven minutes. Then the household dispersed quickly, and Forbes brought in his tray of covered dishes.

"You can pour out the tea, Violet. Your mother is feeling a little tired, and will breakfast in her room."

"Then I think, if you'll excuse me, I'll have my breakfast with her," said Vixen. "She'll be glad of my company, I daresay."

"She has a headache and will be better alone. Stop where you are, if you please, Violet. I have something serious to say to you."

Vixen left off pouring out the tea, clasped her hands in her lap, and looked at Captain Winstanley with the most resolute expression he had even seen in a woman's face.

"Are you going to talk to me about Lord Mallow?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Then spare yourself the trouble. It would be useless."

"I cannot conceive that you should be so besotted as to refuse a man who offers so much. A man who has wealth, rank, youth, good looks——"

"Spare me the catalogue of your friend's merits. I think him a most estimable person. I acknowledge his rank and wealth. But I have refused him."

"You will change your mind."

"I never change my mind."

"You will live to repent your folly

then, Miss Tempest; and all I hope is that your remorse may be keen. It is not one woman in a thousand who gets such a chance. What are you that you should throw it away?"

"I am a woman who would sooner cut my throat than marry a man I cannot honestly love," answered Vixen with unblenching firmness.

"I think I understand your motive," said Captain Winstanley. "Lord Mallow never had a chance with you. The ground was occupied before he came. You are a very foolish girl to reject so good an offer for the sake of another woman's sweet-heart."

"How dare you say that to me?" cried Vixen. "You have usurped my father's place; you have robbed me of my mother's heart. Is not that cause enough for me to hate you? I have only one friend left in the world, Roderick Vawdrey. And you would slander me because I cling to that old friendship, the last remnant of my happy childhood."

"You might have a dozen such friends, if friendship is all you want, and be Lady Mallow into the bargain," retorted Captain Winstanley scornfully. "You are a simpleton to send such a man away despairing. But I suppose it is idle to ask you to hear reason. I am not your father, and even if I were, I daresay you would take your own way in spite of me."

"My father would not have asked me to marry a man I did not love," answered Vixen proudly, her eyes clouding with tears even at the thought of her beloved dead; "and he would have valued Lord Mallow's rank and fortune no more than I do. But you are so fond of a bargain," she added, her eye kindling and her lip curving with bitterest scorn. "You sold Bullfinch, and now you want to sell me."

"By Heaven, madam, I pity the man who may be fool enough to buy you!" cried the captain, starting up from his untasted breakfast, and leaving Vixen mistress of the field.

SOME POPULAR CURES.

A DILIGENT reader of the newspapers might cull therefrom, in the course of a year or two, instances of still prevalent superstitions enough to fill a bulky volume. Many persons are of opinion, that gross superstitions—such as are to be met with in more uncivilised countries—are no longer

existent in our own favoured land; and the result of a collection, such as the one suggested, would therefore surprise them not a little. The survival of a belief in witchcraft, as revealed in the trial for murder, at the Warwick assizes in 1874 of an agricultural labourer, who stuck an old woman, a reputed witch, with a pitchfork, in order, by drawing blood, to free himself from her witchery, would probably be regarded by them as something exceptional, like the preservation of a fly in amber. That that case, however, was not an exceptional one was shown by the facts brought to light in another similar criminal prosecution in the same county, in the course of which it was shown that the whole neighbourhood, in which the assault took place, was permeated with a most degrading belief in witchcraft.

These are but individual instances which have come to the surface, and gained publicity through the criminal courts. Those only who have trod the by-ways of English life know to what an extent a belief in witchcraft and other superstitions obtains, not merely in out-of-the-way country places, and among the illiterate, but in towns, and among the reputedly educated. Indeed, the writer's experience would lead him to the conclusion that there exists more abject superstition among town populations, where the means of education and enlightenment are the greatest, than in rural districts. He, himself, has met with more cases of belief in witchcraft and other foolish superstitions in towns, than in villages; although he has had equal chances for gaining information in each. He once heard a man, born and bred in London, and a Cockney to the backbone, describe a witches' sabbath he had attended, and the ceremony gone through in order to raise the prince of darkness. This person, though by no means an unread man, was not ashamed of avowing his belief in the black art. Many stupid superstitions are privately cherished by apparently educated and intelligent people, who yet are ashamed openly to acknowledge them. Take, for instance, the belief in the evil eye, which, doubtless, most people who know anything about it, imagine is confined to less favoured lands than ours. The writer is not able to say whether the superstition is believed in throughout England, but he has been informed, on good authority, that it is very prevalent in the southern counties, and he knows that it has many

believers in London. A lady of his acquaintance, both intelligent and tolerably well educated, constantly wears a charm against the evil eye. It is somewhat in the shape of a pair of horns, or of the finger and thumb somewhat apart, and is a sure preventive of harm—so she says. Another of his lady acquaintances, one who has seen the world, and who has, moreover, more than ordinary “nons” in the general affairs of life, always protects her children against evil influences, and the ills to which childhood is subject, by hanging a necklace of cloves about their necks. He had previously heard of amber necklets being considered prophylactic against witchcraft and other dread influences, but never before of cloves being similarly potent.

But this is mild fooling in comparison with the various forms of charm and spell against diseases and other ills still used in different parts of the country. Everyone has probably heard that a certain cure for a sty on the eye is to rub it with a wedding-ring, care being taken to rub all one way; but all may not know that an equally good remedy is to stroke the part with a tom-cat's tail! The ring specific is not a new notion, as reference is made to it in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Mad Lovers*:

I have a sty here, Chilax.

CHI. I have no gold to cure it, not a penny.

In Northamptonshire, the tail remedy is applied with a difference. The usual form of applying the charm is for the sufferer, on the first night of the new moon, to procure the tail of a black cat, and after pulling from it one hair, rub the tip nine times over the pustule. If anyone doubt the remedy, let him try it. Another “good thing” for bad eyes and other ailments, is rain-water caught on Holy Thursday. It will keep sweet for a long time if corked up in a clean bottle. This superstition is probably an Irish one, though the writer has met with it in the Staffordshire Potteries.

To take a hair from the dog that bit you is a proverbial cure, and is as commonly credited a superstition in China as here; and yet who would have thought that within a year or two past, in a town like Oldham, a woman could be found to summon the owner of a dog because he would not give her some of its hair to ensure her against any evil consequences accruing from the bite it had given her. And yet such was the case. Not so widely known, probably, but not the less effectual,

is the popular talisman for children during the period of teething. Pluck a few hairs from the dark cross on the back of a donkey, sew them up in a black silk bag, and hang it round a child's neck when teething, and the child will be proof against fits or convulsions. This cure is well known in the north and west of England. One that may very well compare with it for stupidity, is said to be popularly believed in in Gloucestershire. For the reduction of a wen, or “thick neck” in women, an ornamental necklace is made of hair taken from a horse's tail; some say it must be taken from the tail of a grey stallion (*Vide Notes and Queries*). Within a few years the “dead stroke” has also been resorted to in the midland counties, for the cure of wens. A rustic remedy for enlarged throat is to take a snake, and coil it round the neck of the sufferer nine times; then put the snake into a bottle, cork it up, and bury it; as it decays the enlargement will gradually disappear.

Touching for the king's-evil has long since gone out of date, but not by any means because people have become too enlightened to put faith in such a superstition; for a still grosser superstition is yet believed in as regards the cure of the king's-evil. That the toad,

though ugly and venomous,

Wears yet a precious jewel in his head,

is a faith still strong in the bucolic mind, and it consequently holds a prominent place in the rustic pharmacopoeia. Its limbs are a cure for the king's-evil. They should be put into a bag, and tied about the patient's neck. For quinsy, get a live toad, fasten a string round its throat, and hang it up till the body drop from the head; then tie the string round your own neck, and never take it off, night or day, till your fiftieth birthday—and you will never have quinsy again! This is given by a correspondent in *Notes and Queries*, as a Cornish superstition; the writer has also met with it in Cumberland. In Northamptonshire, and probably other midland counties, the toad is likewise employed as a charm to prevent bleeding at the nose. The reptile is killed by transfixing it with some sharp-pointed instrument; afterwards it is placed in a little bag, and hung round the neck. The same charm is also used in cases of fever. Sir K. Digby, in his *Discourse on Sympathy*, has a passage which, in a measure, accounts for the belief in this and other folk-specifics.

"In the time of common contagion," he says, "they used to carry about them the powder of a toad, and sometimes a living toad, or spider, shut up in a box; or else they carry arsenick, or some other venomous substance, which draws into it the contagious air, which otherwise would infect the party."

The spider, also, is still a popular cure. Put into a box, and allowed to pine away, it is a remedy for the ague. The spider, by-the-way, plays a very diverse rôle in folk-lore. In France and Belgium there is a superstition that it has a penchant for the brains of infants, and that, if not watched, it will suck them. It is also imagined that one crossing the forehead in the night causes headache. One caught and buried, is a cure for it. According to other folk-tales it is highly detrimental to destroy one. In Kent the popular saying is :

If you wish to live and thrive,
Let a spider run alive;

and in Surrey there is a dread of killing them. To return to the remedies for the ague, a correspondent of Notes and Queries gives a charm which came under his own notice. It was to tie a bunch of common groundsel on the bare bosom. Certain incantations accompany the application. In Cambridgeshire, a ring of tar around the body is regarded as a cure for the ague. Another popular remedy for the same disease, believed in by the credulous of the same parts, is the wearing of a skein of silk round the part affected.

Some popular cures are rather difficult of performance. A lady in the Potteries informed the writer that to swallow a live mouse was a "sure cure" for consumption, and assured him that she had known a person resort to the remedy. If this were true, it would outdo the feat told by the teetotalers of the man who was treated to a tankard of ale with a dead mouse in it, and who drank it off at a draught—mouse and all—merely remarking that he thought there was a bit of malt in it. In some parts of the country it is hooping-cough that the swallowing of a mouse is good for.

Another popular remedy for hooping-cough, and one very widely believed in, is to take a fish, newly caught, put it into the mouth of the child suffering from the malady, and then let it go again. The theory is that the cough is communicated to the fish. The writer has met with this superstition both in North Germany and in the north of England. A correspondent in Notes and Queries, writing from Phila-

delphia, narrates an instance of the same superstition which came under his own observation in that neighbourhood. An equally intelligible remedy is believed in in some parts of England and Ireland. The writer has met with it in Lancashire and the north. It consists in passing a child suffering from the hooping-cough nine times—in some parts it is three times—under and over a donkey. This also is said to be an infallible cure. The ass is an especial object of regard with the superstitious; the common belief being that the cross he bears on his back was conferred on him, as a mark of peculiar distinction, when the Saviour rode on his back into Jerusalem.

Sheep, too, are gifted with a certain amount of prophylactic power. It is only collectively, however, that they exercise this potency, not individually. Thus, if you want to be cured of a cough, you must pass through a flock of sheep. They are too innocent and harmless, poor things, to be of much repute in folk-medicine; which attributes remedial properties somewhat in the ratio of uncouthness or repulsiveness. Thus we have seen the part the snake, the toad, the spider, &c., play in popular medicine; we might recount how the frog is good for consumption, the eel for deafness, the cockroach for earache, owl-broth for hooping-cough, and so on ad infinitum. With regard to the "owl-broth" cure, it was considered a certain specific in the writer's native place, in the East Riding of Yorkshire. In reference to the owl's place in the popular pharmacopœia, it may not be out of place to quote a bit of lore from Swan's *Speculum Mundi*. That quaint writer says: "The egges of an owle broken, and put into the cups of a drunkard, or one desirous to follow drinking, will so work with him that he will suddenly lothe his good liquor, and be displeased with drinking." In Spain there is a superstition that a stork's egg has a similar potency (*Vide Notes and Queries*, 1874).

The popular cures for warts, and other like excrescences, are very numerous, and vary in almost every county. One mode of charming them away is to take an elder shoot, and rub it on the part; then cut as many notches on the twig as you have warts, bury it in a place where it will soon decay, and, as it rots away, the warts will disappear. This is a southern charm. In Yorkshire, and throughout the north generally, the cure for warts is to take a

black snail and rub the excrescences with it, then impale it on a thorn, and leave it to perish. As it dries up and disappears, the warts will vanish. According to another form of the charm, the warts must be rubbed with a fresh snail for nine successive nights. Still another wart charm is to take the shell of a broad bean, and rub the affected part with the inside thereof; bury the shell, and tell no one about it, and, as it withers away, so will the warts.

It is a curious fact, that while nearly all our most noisome reptiles and insects are possessed of curative virtues, flowers are, under certain circumstances, considered injurious and unlucky. For instance, in Suffolk, to sleep in a room with whitethorn bloom in it, during the month of May, is sure to be followed by some great misfortune. And, if you sweep the home with the

blossom'd broom in May,

You're sure to sweep the head of the house away.

This, of course, has nothing to do with the healing virtues of plants gathered under certain aspects of the moon or stars. In astrological lore, each of the planets governs certain herbs, and they should consequently, when for medicinal use, be gathered "when the planet that governs the herb is essentially dignified." Hence, probably, the superstition that herbs for curative purposes should be gathered when the moon is on the increase. An instance of this belief came under the writer's notice not long since in Northamptonshire, where a respectable man told him of the wonderful cure of a tumour he had seen effected, by means of an adder's tongue (*Ophioglossum Vulgatum*) plucked at the "fulling" of the moon, and applied with the accompaniment of an incantation. How strongly such superstitions still linger in rural districts, is evidenced by the fact that not only do the credulous regard it as necessary to gather herbs during the increase of the moon, but many will not sow their seeds, or kill their pigs, during the waning of the moon. It is believed by many graziers, shepherds, and agriculturalists, that it is not well to "let blood" when the moon is full, nor when there is a new moon; and they believe that if they operate on any of their cattle at the time when the moon is "southing," that animal will certainly die.

Some of the superstitious cures for animals are as curious as any of those given above. To mention a tithe of the charms had recourse to to cure animals

that have been "overlooked"—in other words, bewitched—would take up a chapter by itself. One of the commonest, and perhaps most widely spread, is to stroke the "overlooked" animal with a twig from an ash-tree, under the roots of which a horse-shoe has been buried. Within a few years past this charm has been practised in the midland counties. A horse-shoe is still nailed on stable and cow-house doors to protect the animals against witchcraft. A writer in *Notes and Queries* relates that in Oxfordshire he knew a case where a man cut a hole in the tail of a cow, which was suffering after calving, and put a piece of bacon in the wound. The narrator does not say whether the remedy was effectual, but there can be little doubt it was, as such cures usually are. A similar superstition is the "worming" of dogs to prevent rabies. In Sussex, "Good Friday Bread" is considered good for the "scours" in calves. But it is not in Sussex only that faith is put in the curative virtues of "Good Friday Bread." In all parts of the country bread or biscuits are still baked on that day, and kept for medical purposes. Bread thus made never gets mouldy, and is considered very useful, grated in brandy, as a medicine. It is often kept for years, sometimes as many as twenty. A hot-cross bun is frequently preserved in Northamptonshire as an astringent.

There are persons still living who have been "stroked" by a hanged man's hand for the dispelling of tumours; a dead man's hand being supposed to possess such virtues by being passed nine times over the part affected. In Devonshire there is a superstition, that if a person suffering from any disease throw a handkerchief on the coffin of a suicide, the disease will be cured as the handkerchief rots away. So, touching a dead body prevents the person so doing from dreaming of it.

Charms are still worn. The "lucky bone," for instance, is calculated to protect against all sorts of adverse influences. It is a bone taken from the head of a sheep; and its form, which is that of the T cross, may, perhaps, have had something to do with the talismanic virtue with which it is endued. This form of the sacred symbol is frequently found on Druidical monuments. In Northamptonshire, and also in Yorkshire, the fore-foot of a hare, worn constantly in the pocket, is considered a fine charm against the "rheumatiz." Scot, in his *Discovery of Witchcraft*, mentions the bone of a hare's foot, which,

he says, "mitigateth the cramp." Another charm for rheumatism, which, however, the writer has only met with in one part, that is, in Birmingham, is a potato. So long as it is carried in the pocket, the bearer will never suffer from that malady. *Probatum est!* is the conclusive dictum of two old ladies. One of the same dames communicated the following spell to prevent a thorn from festering, which, she said, she had been taught as a child:

Our Saviour was of a virgin born,
His head was crowned with a crown of thorn;
It never canker'd nor fester'd at all,
As I hope, in Christ, this never shall.

Similar rhymes may still occasionally be heard in country parts; but they seem, generally, to be giving place to more dismal superstitions. It would take too much space in this article to go into the question of written talismans for the causing or cure of love, for healing diseases, and for procuring luck; but the reader may take it for granted that there are plenty of professors of this art ready to impose on the credulous, and still greater numbers ever ready to be duped by them.

PARTING.

Weep not that we must part;
Partings are short, eternity is long.
Life is but one brief stage,
And they that say love ends with life are wrong.
List to thine own heart's cry—
Love cannot die.
What though so far away?
Thy thoughts are still with me, and with thee mine,
And absence has no power
To lessen what by nature is divine.
List to thine own heart's cry—
Love cannot die.
Then weep no more, my love;
Weeping but shows thy trust in me is small.
Faith is by calmness proved.
For know this truth: thou canst not love at all
Unless thine own heart cry—
Love cannot die.

THE POETS' LEAGUE.

A STORY.

HENRI and François were two pretty men; they lay in bed till the clock struck ten.

This melancholy fact might have brought them to a sense of shame, if they had known enough moral philosophy to be familiar with the rebuke of the early poet to a pair of worthies who similarly disgraced themselves. But lacking this guidance, and having, it must be admitted, some reason for wishing to remain as long as possible in a state of unconsciousness

on this particular morning, Henri and François slumbered pertinaciously till the sun was high in the heavens. Then they woke simultaneously, rubbed their eyes, and stared blankly at each other.

The room they occupied was situated near the summit of a mountainous edifice, known as the *Hôtel de Bourgogne*, Rue du Bac, Paris. The architect of the *Hôtel de Bourgogne* must have been a moralist, who had the idea that it was a useful discipline, to people in search of a lodging, to be obliged to climb almost impracticable stairs. Henri and François were able to beguile their leisure, of which they had a good deal, by surveying from their elevated perch the passengers in the Rue du Bac who had the aspect of travellers, and speculating whether these would be rash enough to incur the Alpine perils which attended the quest of quarters in the *Hôtel de Bourgogne*. On the whole, the mountaineers were not numerous. Occasionally a family of provincials trooped into the courtyard, and were greeted by Madame Lafosse with the affectionate warmth characteristic of that little woman. They were Normans; people from her native place—sturdy, homely, and with an immense capacity for cider—who were either personally known to her, or commended to her care by relatives and friends. At such times Henri and François were not conspicuous, but showed a shyness not easy to reconcile with their customary behaviour. They were more at their ease, though they did not understand a word of English, with the few adventurous Britons who were "personally conducted" to the *Hôtel de Bourgogne* by a humble disciple of Cook.

Now the reason why these young men were so shy of the Norman visitors was not, I am sorry to say, at all creditable to them. Henri Dessarts and François Vernet were cousins, born at Caen, whence they had come to Paris only a year before to study medicine. They studied to such purpose, that, whenever they met their professor, he scowled at them, and made no further sign of recognition. It may have been, as Henri was fond of saying, that the professor was madly jealous, and afraid that if he helped them on, they would eclipse him. Or, to adopt François's favourite theory, he was devoured by spleen because of the squib they wrote about him in one of the boulevard journals. But Henri was careful not to mention his conjecture to anybody but his

cousin; and as to the soundness of François's theory there was some reasonable doubt, seeing that the journal in question had only lived three days, and that the authors of the squib aforesaid had monopolised the circulation.

The fact was, that the young Normans had grievously neglected the study of medicine, and with the perversity of youth had given their minds to everything except the object which their parents fondly supposed them to be pursuing. Henri was a philosopher; François was a poet. Henri wrote treatises on cosmogony, and puzzled simple Madame Lafosse with profound but incomprehensible observations on the origin of the universe. François declaimed his own verses and those of Théophile Gautier—with a marked preference for the former—to anybody who would listen to him. Both argued at great length that medicine was a commonplace profession, and that their vocation was not to check the petty ailments of the body, but to cultivate the public mind. Of some of the verses of Parisian poets which François was fond of reciting and imitating, I fear it must be said that they were eminently calculated, in a peculiar sense, to "minister to minds diseased."

It was the firm belief of Madame Lafosse that Henri and François were the most remarkable young men that France had produced. She had patted their heads long before they dreamt of medicine except as an unpleasant sequence to excessive consumption of sugar-candy; and when they were adolescent, and their parents proposed to send them to Paris, she had insisted on receiving them at the Hôtel de Bourgogne on terms which were ridiculously out of proportion to their appetites. Everything they did and said was wonderful in her eyes. Whatever they did not think fit to do she regarded as unworthy of them. She became quite convinced that the study of medicine was a waste of time, and that doctors were much overrated people, of whom there were far too many. Of a philosopher she had never before heard; so she took it for granted that Henri's claims to that mysterious distinction were such as would greatly benefit both himself and mankind at large, though the precise character of the operation might not be apparent. François's verses were more within her comprehension, and the vast number of cigarettes essential to the production of

those great works, gave her a vague idea that making rhymes was one of the industrial arts. But, as Henri showed with unanswerable force, these things, if reported at home, would very probably be misunderstood—the parental mind being, as everybody knows, prone to misconception in such matters—and so Madame Lafosse was not communicative to her provincial visitors about the young men's affairs; but when enquiries were made as to the progress of their studies, limited her responses to ejaculations of wonder, which were taken to mean that the attainments of MM. Vernet and Dessarts baffled description.

Now, in addition to the profitable labours which have been briefly indicated, our young Normans had taken upon themselves the arduous task of making love. That rugged fastness, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, had lately received two new inhabitants, about whom nothing very definite was known, except that they were not in very good circumstances—a fact sufficiently evident in their choice of a residence. M. Morel was an elderly gentleman who seemed to pass his time in profound abstraction, from which he was rarely seen to rouse himself except to make notes upon small pieces of paper, which he afterwards scattered about in an absent way, giving his daughter no little trouble in collecting them. Henri thought that M. Morel must be a philosopher, and that the reason why Mademoiselle Louise was so careful in gathering up all those scraps of paper was that they were the memoranda of her father's invaluable speculations. François was equally certain that the old gentleman was a poet, and burned to commune with a kindred spirit. They united in regarding mademoiselle as an angel.

After this the young lady received a succession of mysterious parcels, which puzzled her a good deal. These contained gloves, lace, ornaments of some little value, or bonbons of the costliest quality, accompanied by a document which always proved to be either a copy of verses, in which the writer declared himself enamoured of a being who was an embodied perfume, or something equally delightful; or a series of sparkling observations which began somewhat in this style: "Philosophers have long since decided that it is the highest aspiration of the human soul to find its counterpart, and having found it, to spare nothing that will bring about a union so beneficial to both."

"Is it this which is to lead to the union of souls?" asks mademoiselle, as she holds up a packet of sweetmeats for the inspection of Madame Lafosse, with whom she is conferring on the subject of these remarkable tokens.

"And Henri, too!" sighs madame, who recognises the philosopher's handwriting. "But it is most serious, mademoiselle, that you should have won the hearts of both these poor boys, for if——"

"You mean I may be a cause of quarrel, n'est-ce pas?" interrupts Louise. "For poetry and philosophy to fall out would be sad, would it not? And yet we cannot make a trio of united souls."

"But you need not be cruel, mademoiselle," says madame, who resents this railery.

"Mon Dieu! who am I that I should be cruel?" returns mademoiselle in an altered tone. "It is good and kind of M. Vernet and M. Dessarts to send me such pretty things. I do not accept them, for that would be misunderstood; but I am grateful, very grateful, for it is long, hélas! since anybody was good to me."

And with these words she goes away, and Madame Lafosse, looking compassionately after her, murmurs "Pauvre enfant!" wondering that one so young should have felt the coldness of the world.

But mademoiselle's spirits must have revived, for with a touch of mischief she sent back Henri's gifts to François, and François's to Henri, and in two bewitching little notes made matters worse by thanking the philosopher for his charming poem, and the poet for his instructive and deeply interesting dissertation on the union of souls.

The young men had opened the amatory campaign without any exchange of confidence on the subject, and the discovery of the rivalry caused each to sink considerably in the other's estimation. François's poetical appeal to the beloved one seemed dreadful rubbish to Henri; and Henri's essay on the philosophical character of the tender passion made it clear to François that his cousin was suffering from softening of the brain. But as it seemed impossible to both that their advances could really have been declined, each cherished the conviction that mademoiselle had mistaken him for the other; François being certain that she carried his poem next her heart, and Henri that his epistle alone was admitted to that paradise. It was a little disconcerting that the lady should have

confused their identity, but it never entered their heads that she had impartially refused to encourage either.

In this state of opinion they observed a certain sulkiness towards each other, and as François considered that his cousin's behaviour justified him in temporarily confiscating that gentleman's property, and as Henri had much the same opinion with regard to François, nothing was said as to the bonbons, &c., which were invested with the melancholy interest of unrequited affection.

But there was a subject of vital importance which it was necessary to discuss without delay. When the cousins woke at that lamentably late hour when they were introduced to the reader, they were harassed by one painful idea. They were short of money, and had no visible means of raising any more. The virtue of thrift is not always practised by poets and philosophers, and as the gaieties of Paris had absorbed a large portion of their funds, and as the expenses of the preliminary operations against the citadel they were both besieging had made havoc with the remainder, and as there were certain debts which if not paid very soon might be the cause of unpleasant revelations, the financial embarrassment of François and Henri threatened to be serious.

"What's to be done?" demanded Henri, as he got out of bed and into his slippers. "You must have some money, François. What have you done with it?"

"Et vous, mon cousin?" replied François with a shrug. "What account can you give?"

"Have you got any ideas then?" asked Henri, who was naturally indisposed for financial explanation. "A man who thinks he can startle the world with his powers of invention ought to be able to find a way through a cul-de-sac!"

"Not a bit, mon cher. That is your department. You philosophers profess to know everything that is in heaven above and the earth beneath, and therefore you ought to have no trouble in getting two poor devils—yourself being one of them—out of a wretched little scrape about money. Isn't your profundity equal to producing an earthquake to swallow up these misérables who insist on being paid?"

"Enough of this folly," ejaculated Henri. "If we don't find some means of meeting the difficulty, one of us will have to write home, and you know what that will lead to."

François knew only too well. In Normandy they had the most inadequate ideas as to the cost of decent living in the capital; and if there were any hint that the young men were not solvent, there would be a rush of unreasonable fathers to Paris, and an enquiry into past and present, which would probably end in the rustication of the pair for an indefinite period.

François clutched his hair by way of encouragement to inspiration, stared wildly at the opposite wall, and then exclaimed: "I have it!"

"You have what?" enquired Henri incredulously.

"The plan which will save us. We will start a journal!"

As a matter of fact, François had been revolving this idea for two days, but, like many geniuses, he did not choose to admit that what seemed a sudden conception was really the result of cold calculation.

"Nothing simpler, nothing surer, nothing more admirable," he continued. "Listen. Your philosophy has taught you that there are a good many fools in the world."

"It has," assented Henri briskly. "The follies of mankind may be divided into two heads; first——"

"Never mind lecturing now; the only heads wanted in the present affair are yours and mine. I imagine that a large proportion of these fools believe themselves to be poets. Paris is full of them. Now, if we set up a journal which will give them the chance of distinguishing themselves, they will come about us in shoals."

"And the money?" interposed the sceptical Henri.

"Will be assured at once. We will announce our journal as *La Ligue des Poètes*, and make it a condition that every contributor shall pay a hundred francs for the privilege of calling himself a member of the league. There will be a score of subscriptions in a week."

Anywhere but in Paris this enterprise would have been impossible. In London such an invitation to join a league of poets would be scouted as a transparent attempt to obtain money under false pretences. No one would suppose that association with such a body could bring any sort of distinction. But though François Vernet was not very wise, he knew something of the vagaries of the Parisian imagination, and he knew that his project would be taken in sober earnest by a number of

people, who would be delighted to pay for the pleasure of making it known that they belonged to a poetical society.

He had another object. M. Morel being, as François believed, a poet, would naturally take an interest in the new journal. This, the young man hoped, would afford him opportunities of converse with mademoiselle, and of deepening the impression which he had not the least doubt he had made upon her heart.

The father and daughter kept themselves very much aloof from the rest of the household, rarely appearing save at meals, and often not even then. Both François and Henri had frequently lain in wait for Louise on the stairs, but that young lady treated them as if she had been accustomed to such ambuscades all her life, and thought they were rather a waste of ingenuity. From the day that François presented her with a copy of the first number of *La Ligue des Poètes*, mademoiselle became more reserved, rarely went out, and almost invariably dined with her father in their own room. So far from being discouraged, François was more enamoured than ever, and even admired the maidenly tact with which Louise dissembled that tender regard for him which he was confident she entertained.

The journal actually made its appearance, and the immediate result was that no inconsiderable number of poets emerged from their obscurity like worms after a shower. Money, too, was forthcoming, and for the time, at all events, François and Henri were quite affluent. Ambitious versifiers paid their hundred francs, and if they had been content with that, and with proclaiming to their friends that they were members of the Poets' League by having that distinction printed on their cards, all might have been well; but they persisted in sending in enormous bundles of manuscript—the accumulated musings, and imaginings, and ravings of years—and in demanding that every line should be published. Unfortunately, *La Ligue des Poètes* was of necessity a very small sheet, and as it was obviously indispensable to its success that the products of François's brilliant imagination, and of Henri's studies of the human mind, should figure in its columns, there was little space left for the glorification of anybody else. Hence the majority of the poets became discontented, not to say mutinous, and their bad humour was not diminished by the prominence accorded to a new and very singular contributor.

As M. Morel made no sign, François determined to have a private interview. The opportunities were few, for mademoiselle was vigilant, and more than once intimated for his edification that her father was not well enough to see anyone. But one day, taking advantage of her temporary absence, he made his way into their sitting-room.

The old man was seated in an arm-chair, engaged, as usual, in making notes and dropping them on the floor.

He looked up as François entered, but showed no sign of recognition.

"You know me, M. Morel?" suggested François, after a pause, during which he was much impressed by the multitude of ideas which were committed to the carpet. "I am François Vernet."

"Oh, M. Vernet. Yes—yes," responded the old gentleman, who then relapsed into his literary occupation.

"What do you think of our new enterprise?" asked François, who was pained by this indifference.

"New enterprise? What is it?"

"Why, the journal we have established—*La Ligne des Poètes*."

"What do you say?" exclaimed M. Morel, suddenly becoming much excited. "A poets' journal! My dear M. Vernet, how do you do? I am charmed to see you. Excuse me one moment while I collect my verses. A poets' journal—ah!" Then with trembling fingers he began to pick up from the floor the scraps of paper which seemed all at once to have become precious. "My verses, M. Vernet," he continued, "are, as you see, somewhat in disorder. It is my method of composition. When I have written down my idea, I cannot bear to have it on the page under my eye. When the mind is creating, it should not be troubled by the imperfections of its previous work."

François felt that he was in the presence of original genius, and reverently assisted in collecting the stray thoughts which M. Morel, under pressure of inspiration, had thrown into the fireplace.

A step was heard on the stairs.

"Quick!" cried M. Morel, thrusting the papers into François's hand. "That may be Louise, and she must not know what we have been doing. Poor girl! she says I must not write, because it is bad for my health. Women are very good, but small minds—small minds, M. Vernet. Make haste! When you have published these I can give you plenty more. Always

creating," he added, tapping his forehead, "always."

François put the poetical fragments into his pockets with a vague misgiving that they were scarcely in the form for publication. Moreover, his enthusiasm was damped by the knowledge that so far from making a further agreeable impression on mademoiselle, he would, by feeding the excitement so injurious to her father, incur her displeasure. However, there was nothing for it now but to humour the old man, and so secure his goodwill.

Preoccupied with these thoughts, François did not pay much attention to a stranger whom he met on the stairs, and who was enquiring the whereabouts of M. Morel's apartments; nor when Louise, flying past him, overtook the new-comer, and with a cry of joyful surprise almost hugged that personage, did François manifest much concern, for the stranger was an elderly gentleman with a grizzled moustache, who was probably mademoiselle's uncle, or godfather, or somebody equally unlikely to excite jealousy in an amorous breast. François's feelings were of an entirely opposite description, for as she took the visitor's arm, after this affectionate greeting, Louise favoured the young man with a smile which filled him with infinite satisfaction, especially as it was observed by Henri, who happened to come upon the scene at that precise moment.

But when François came to examine M. Morel's verses, his exultation was a little sobered. He spent some hours in the vain endeavour to reconcile the fragments, which were consistent neither with themselves nor with one another. M. Morel's system favoured rapidity of production, but it was not equally favourable to coherence. As a last resort François resolved to publish the verses separately, except in one or two instances in which he thought there was sufficient congruity to justify his venturing on a couplet. The result was that the isolated verses were like signposts which pointed nowhere; while the couplets resembled semi-detached houses, having a similarity of aspect but no internal connection.

The appearance of these compositions, and the space which they occupied, made the other poets very angry. Letters of indignant remonstrance became frequent. Some people even went the length of insisting that their precious verses should be given to the world forthwith, or their

subscriptions returned. As the money was spent, and as it would have been impossible, even if *La Ligue des Poètes* had been published three times a day, to thrust upon Paris a tithe of the effusions which were struggling towards publicity, the minds of MM. Vernet and Dessarts were not free from care.

Henri's soul was especially exercised. He was not troubled by the advent of the gentleman with the grizzled monstache any more than François. On the contrary, having heard from Madame Lafosse that this was an old friend of the Morels, who had just returned from the Mauritius or Macedonia—madame was not sure which—with a fortune, Henri devoted some part of his time to a calculation of the probable amount of dot which mademoiselle would receive out of this Mauritian or Macedonian treasure. Obviously nothing was more likely than that this wealthy friend, who was so much attached to M. Morel that he came every day to visit him, would give mademoiselle at her marriage a dowry which would very considerably enhance her charms. Of course a philosopher could not have any hankering after mere money, but it was necessary to the success of his investigations of human character that he should take account of facts.

In this state of mind Henri was naturally less concerned about the quality of M. Morel's poetry than about the circumstance that François had ingratiated himself with the old man. It was clear to Henri that his cousin had already made some progress in mademoiselle's affections, for not only had he seen her smile on François in a way which no philosopher could tolerate, but he had since observed them whispering together on the stairs. The shock of this spectacle was aggravated by the intelligence communicated to him immediately afterwards by Madame Lafosse.

"My poor Henri," said madame, "you do not look well. And no wonder!"

"What is the matter with me now?" asked Henri with an uneasy laugh. Madame was wont to worry herself about the real or supposed ailments of the young men.

"Ah! I know; it is the heart. You suffer here"—she smote herself sympathetically on the left side—"and I cannot help you! Hélas! you have more to bear, mon pauvre enfant!"

"What do you mean?"

"She is to be married in two days."

"Diable!"

"But she has a tender heart for you, Henri; for she told me not to tell you yet because——"

"No more!" he exclaimed. "That 'because' is enough to poison me!" And he rushed away in a most unphilosophical rage.

For the moment Henri had a firm conviction that François was the happy man. He believed he saw it all. He was to be kept in the dark until it was all over, and François was in possession of mademoiselle and the dot from Macedonia or Mauritius. How to defeat this project was his first thought. Suddenly an idea struck him. The printer of *La Ligue des Poètes* was expecting "copy." There was but too much reason to believe that the next number of that remarkable journal would be the last. The funds were all but exhausted; money was owing to the printer, and he had made it plain that he would do no more unless this was paid. All this passed through Henri's mind, as he wrote some hurried sentences, took a few gold pieces from a drawer, and started for the office.

La Ligue des Poètes came out next day, and François was astounded to read in it a wild denunciation of the Government. Henri absented himself till the middle of the afternoon, when he returned to the Hôtel de Bourgogne just as a commissary of police, accompanied by a gendarme, entered the courtyard. The object of this visit was soon manifest. The officers had presented themselves with the view of escorting François and Henri to the prefecture.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Madame Lafosse, before whose eyes arose a horrid vision of the guillotine. "What have they done? Have pity, messieurs. They are so young. François was only twenty last June, and Henri——"

"Hush! It is a mistake. We shall soon set it right," said François, who had no fancy for being seen in this predicament by mademoiselle.

Henri smiled grimly.

"You wrote that imbecility!" said François as they marched towards the prefecture.

"Yes."

"Do you know what the penalty is when a journalist discusses politics without the permission of the Government?"

"Two thousand francs fine, which we cannot pay, or six months' imprisonment,

which we shall certainly get," said Henri with equanimity.

"Ciel! Are you mad?" demanded his cousin in amazement.

Henri shrugged his shoulders. François's agitation was a luxury to him, though he was himself going into durance vile.

Arrived at the prefecture, they found that they could not be examined until the following morning. Accordingly, they passed the night under the affectionate care of the gendarmes, and early the next day they were taken before the prefect. Their appearance in the streets caused considerable commotion, for they were evidently expected by a band of about fifty people, who pursued them with savage cries of, "Where are my hundred francs?" and threatened them with sticks and umbrellas. In the midst of this demonstration a carriage rolled by in which were seated M. Morel, his daughter, and the friend with the grizzled moustache. Mademoiselle was in travelling costume, and her face was flushed and happy.

"Parbleu! but our roads are different," said François half aloud, as he turned his head another way. "She to happiness; I to prison!"

"Why—you don't mean to say—she is—married?" gasped Henri, who began to have an inkling of the truth.

"Did not Madame Lafosse tell you what was going to happen?" said François, surprised. "Mademoiselle half admitted it when she begged me three days ago not to publish any more of her father's verses, because it disturbed his nerves. Other people's nerves were a good deal the worse for it too," he added ruefully, as he looked around at the angry crowd.

"Then my stratagem was——" Henri could say no more. As for François, he no sooner grasped the situation than the humour of it proved too much for him, and he burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter in the middle of the street; which indecorous performance so exasperated the members of the Poets' League that they were with difficulty prevented from falling upon the projectors of that defunct society tooth and nail.

Their misdemeanour having been clearly proved, François and Henri were duly incarcerated; but, after having had the advantage of a month's meditation in seclusion, they were released. The course of events had convinced MM. Vernet and Dessarts, senior, that the study of medicine

in Paris was not a desirable pursuit, and, accordingly, their hopeful offspring returned home, where they continued to practise poetry and philosophy with a success which, if not very serviceable to themselves, was at all events inoffensive to other people.

ALL OR NOTHING.

BY MRS. CASHEL HONEY.

AUTHOR OF "A HOUSE OF CARDS," "GRIFFITH'S DOUBLE," &c. &c.

CHAPTER XXXV. A QUESTION OF IDENTITY.

A FEW weeks after the death of Mrs. Monroe, Miss Wells, having hung up the key of her apartment in the bureau of the old hotel at Nice, set out in that independent fashion which she prized so highly, not indeed for Jericho, but on a sufficiently vague expedition. She needed change and recreation; the last task of the self-appointed work that she had accomplished had cost her a good deal, and if she was to go on, she must not fret, or look back; and, above all, she must take care of her own health. She would have a pleasant ramble among mountains somewhere, but first, she must go to Paris for a few days. It was rather warm weather for Paris, where there was no sea to temper the heat which Miss Wells did not mind at Nice; but that could not be helped. It was not her way to let herself be influenced by considerations of that kind. She had something to do at Paris, and when it was done she would begin to take her holiday.

As she journeyed up to the beautiful city in a crowded and stuffy train, Miss Wells arranged in her methodical mind all that she meant to do in Paris, and the order of it. The business she had undertaken first, then a visit to a certain hospital where she should get some useful hints, a few hours at the Salon, a few minutes in each of the great churches, a few purchases at the Bon Marché, a drive in the Bois, and then she would be off to the mountains.

"Barrière de la Glacière," said Miss Wells to herself, as she looked over some memoranda in her pocket-book; "I have not a notion where it is, but I daresay it will be a pleasant drive. And I am going on a pleasant errand. How glad they will be to get the money for their poor old people, and how pleased at her remembrance of them! It was a fine act of hers, too; there is a great deal of self-denial in that hundred pounds."

Miss Wells's business in Paris was the fulfilment of a request made by Mrs. Monroe shortly before her death. She had saved out of her very limited means—she possessed only a small annuity, which died with her—one hundred pounds, and this sum she had confided to Miss Wells for a special purpose. She had no relative in the world except Mrs. Dunstan, to whom she wished a few of her personal effects to be sent; but the money she had saved she was free to dispose of, and it was to be given to the first friends whom she had found in her great trouble, by the hands of the last friend, who would see her safely through it. Every other wish which she had expressed had been faithfully carried out by Miss Wells, who was now about to fulfil this one. She felt rather curious, and a little hurt about Mrs. Dunstan, who had taken no notice of the letter in which she had written her the particulars of her only relative's death. The receipt of a packing-case containing the articles sent to Bevis from Nice—not immediately after Mrs. Monroe's death, but when Miss Wells became convinced that Mrs. Dunstan did not mean to write—was formally notified to her by Captain Dunstan; but no other communication reached her. Even that dear lovely Mrs. Thornton, who had been so fond of Mrs. Monroe, had not written a line, and though she was in such trouble herself Miss Wells thought she might have done that; indeed, her own trouble would but have been a reason the more. It was very strange, considering all that they had gone through together, and Miss Wells felt a curious contradictory kind of retrospective pity for the loneliness of her dead friend who was so little missed or remembered. She almost wondered that nice Miss Carmichael had not written, but she felt she must put these things out of her head. She had been particularly interested in a certain set of people who had chance to come in her way, but she was not going to be disappointed because they had soon and easily forgotten her. In this healthy frame of mind Miss Wells set out on her expedition to the distant region of Paris, where her business lay.

A porte cochère in a lofty, dingy wall, above which the gently stirring boughs of some fine acacia trees were visible, admitted Miss Wells to a peaceful scene. Three sides of a large piece of ground, which combined the features of a lawn and a garden, were enclosed by the main build-

ing and the wings of a very old house, with a leaden roof, tall narrow windows, and a flagged verandah. A superb acacia tree occupied the centre of the lawn; and two or three wicker chairs, and a light table strewn with needlework, indicated that the inmates of the house were wont to make a summer drawing-room of the smooth green sward under the spreading shade. There would be some delay before Miss Wells could see the person for whom she enquired, and, the lawn being vacant, she asked to be permitted to wait there in the cool air, rather than in the parlour. She took one of the wicker chairs, and sat patiently under the shade of the great acacia, feeling pleasantly the stillness and seclusion of the place, in which no one seemed to be stirring, though, as she knew, there was plenty of busy life within those walls. She had been there perhaps a quarter of an hour when a slight sound caused her to turn in its direction. No doubt the person whom she expected to see was coming to her there. A low-lying branch hid the approaching figure, but she discerned a plain black skirt. The next moment the figure came from behind the tree into full view. A tall, slight, youthful form, clad in deep mourning; a fair, delicate, pale face surmounted by a widow's bonnet, which hid the bright hair, revealed themselves to Miss Wells, who sprang up with an exclamation of almost terrified surprise, and gazed at the lady with mingled fascination and recoil.

"I beg your pardon; I have disturbed you. I came for my book," said the lady, as she passed Miss Wells with a bow, and approached the table. But Miss Wells, from whose florid face the colour had vanished, and who was trembling quite visibly, made no conventional reply.

"For God's sake, tell me who you are?"
No answer.

"Pray forgive me; I don't mean to be rude; but it is impossible—the likeness is so remarkable—I never saw such a thing—and she was very dear to me."

"She! Whom?"

"Janet Monroe."

As they had come to her that day at The Chantry; as they had come to her that other day upon the terrace at Bevis; so the ringing in her ears, the dull throbbing at her heart, came to Janet now, warning her. She caught at a chair, and sank into it with a deep sigh, to the great alarm of Miss Wells.

"Ah, mon Dieu! Is it that Madame Monroe finds herself ill?"

This question was asked by the person whom Miss Wells had come to see; a kindly middle-aged woman in the dress of a religious, who had joined them unperceived.

"Madame Monroe? Is that the name of this lady?"

"Yes—yes; this is Madame Monroe. Ah, she is better; it is nothing. It is the heat, and she is not strong. See, she is quite revived. Pardon, madame, you wished to speak with me."

"I did; but is it well to leave this lady. Are you better?" She addressed Janet in that tone, solicitous but firm, which seldom failed to inspire liking and confidence, and Janet opened her eyes with a faint smile.

"I am quite well now; it was nothing; only the heat."

"Remain where you are," said the religious, "and when madame has told me her business, we will return to you. Poor little lady," she added, as she conducted Miss Wells to the parlour, "she has had her troubles, I fear, like all in this sad world; but she is at peace here, and she comes to us recommended by an old friend." They entered the house, and were hidden from Janet.

She was recovering from the shock of the words that had been spoken to her, but only to bewilderment and fear. Had her term of rest and peace come to an end? Who was this stranger, kindly-natured and good, indeed, if her face and her voice might be trusted, who evidently had a clue of some kind by which she might trace Janet's identity? Supposing she were to use it, and, discovering her secret, consider that she ought to reveal it? Then what could come to Janet except the miserable dread that her husband might disregard her prayer, from any of those motives which were so small and meaningless to her. Then she tried to think that she was frightening herself for nothing: the stranger had come to the reverend mother on business of her own; she would forget the accidental likeness, that had struck her so strongly, in the claims of that business; and, seeing Janet no more, would think of her no more. Then Janet rose, with the intention of going away, but found she could not walk a yard, or stand steadily, for the ringing and the throbbing; and when she sat down again she could not think at all clearly,

but knew she must wait until somebody should come, who would help her to get back to her room. She had heard somebody, she supposed it was Dr. Andrews, say during her illness that it looked as if she had had a shock, and that she was a bad subject for shocks. She must be so, indeed, when an occurrence such as this could make her so ill and helpless.

Miss Wells acquitted herself of her commission, and was well rewarded by the gratitude of the reverend mother, who asked her many questions about the young widow who had cherished so lasting a remembrance of her sojourn in the little convent. It was curious, she said, except that the finger of the good God was to be seen in everything if it were but looked for, that they were able just then to do something in memory of their benefactress. The poor little lady out there—the reverend mother pointed to the window—had come to them in the character of a relative of Mrs. Monroe, asking them to receive her as a boarder for Mrs. Monroe's sake, and they had done so.

"Indeed!" said Miss Wells; "and when was that?" She had not mentioned the date of Mrs. Monroe's death, and the reverend mother's answer let in a flood of light upon her, by informing her that this relative of Mrs. Monroe's had been received at the convent within ten days after that event.

"What was her precise relationship to Mrs. Monroe?"

"She was her cousin, of the same name, too, as she tells me. She will be cheered when she learns this curious circumstance; and she needs it. She has no friends in Paris."

What had happened? Of Janet's identity Miss Wells had no doubt. That the mysterious fact of Mrs. Dunstan's being where she was implied some great misfortune, she felt equally certain; and the recollection that the friend she had so lately lost had loved this only relative stirred strongly in Miss Wells's heart.

At this moment the reverend mother was told that somebody else wanted to see her, and Miss Wells availed herself of the opportunity to return to the lawn, and, as she said, introduce herself to her countrywoman.

Janet was still sitting where they had left her. Her head lay back wearily against the tall back of the deep wicker chair, her hands lay idly in her lap; she was the very image of lassitude and hopelessness, far

more sad to see than ever her namesake had been, even when she was fading most rapidly.

Miss Wells went close up to her, and dealing promptly with the nervous apprehension in her grief-stricken face, said: "I am Martha Wells. It was I who wrote to you from Nice. Janet Monroe died with her hand in mine. Will you not trust me, Mrs. Dunstan?"

In England, as elsewhere, time was running on, and the first impression made by the events that had occurred at Bevis had passed away. Captain Dunstan had been solicitous only that it should be understood in the fullest possible sense that his wife was not to blame for the separation between them, which, it soon became known, had taken place. For this very reason Janet was all the more severely blamed, especially as the "rights and wrongs" of the matter were but imperfectly known; and the most charitably disposed towards her supposed she must be mad, and that Captain Dunstan was hushing it up. At all events it was plain that he felt it very severely, and that there was an end to all the pleasant prospects of Bevis proving an "acquisition" to the neighbourhood.

Captain Dunstan did feel Janet's flight very severely—as a terrible blow to his pride, and an extraordinary revelation of her character. It was not only that he had never suspected the existence of such love and such jealousy, such an exalted and impossible ideal in her mind as would render the knowledge of his motives for making her his wife intolerable to her, while yet she should be perfectly secure from anything that could be regarded as want of kindness and observance on his part; but he had never believed in feelings of the kind at all, on anyone's part, out of a romance. Of course he knew she loved him. Had not Mrs. Drummond told him so, and had not she herself owned it in a very dignified and becoming way when he "proposed" to her, and many times during the brief engagement which he had found, to tell the truth, rather irksome? But that she should take things in this tragic way astonished him. It hurt him keenly, too, and made him think, as he had never thought before, of what the vows and the promises of marriage mean, how awful they are, how lightly taken, and how ill-kept, even when there is no open or defiant breach of the letter of them. He had always behaved well to Janet, and he did

not doubt that he should always have continued to do so; but he could not deny to himself that he had always been thinking of another woman, and that she had accused him truly, convicting him out of his own mouth, and left him—her interpretation of their respective positions being granted—justly. It was more the manner of it than the action itself that he regretted so vividly. Perhaps the unsuitability between them would, under any circumstances, have proved too great for comfort; but in that case there would have been a middle course so easily taken, one adopted by lots of people every day, without scandal, or gossip, or the unpleasantness of this method of hers. He was very seriously troubled about Janet, and oppressed by the fear that she might be actually suffering in material ways while her retreat remained undiscovered. Of course he should find her some day; he never really doubted that; and in the meantime he was most anxious that it should not be suspected that he did not know what had become of her, and it was not suspected, beyond the small circle of those who knew the fact. The shock and surprise of the desperate step that his wife had taken, and the success that attended her intention of concealment, had the effect upon him of clearing his moral vision very considerably; and Janet, if it would have been a satisfaction, might have had that of knowing that she was perpetually in his remembrance, and, in a strange sort of way, an object of curiosity, a subject of questioning to him, such as she had never been before. It was as though he had married one woman, and his wife had turned out to be another just as she vanished from him; that other a less gentle, less perfect, less complaisant being, indeed, but more interesting, more individual, more wilful. And yet, in the bottom of his heart, when Edward Dunstan mused upon the revelation of Janet's love, and what was her ideal, his real thought was: If it had only been the right woman who had loved him thus!

Events had marched also with time; and late in the autumn Julia Carmichael and John Sandilands were to be married. John had come home with Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and the wedding was to take place at Hunsford. Dunstan and Esdaile had not met since Esdaile's return; but they were to meet soon, for Dunstan had asked Esdaile to come to Bevis after the wedding, at which he was to be present, and Esdaile had promised to do so. John

Sandilands and Julia were also to visit him before they left England. It would be a strange meeting, and Dunstan would be glad when it was over.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and Amabel Ainslie were the only guests at Hunsford, in addition to the bridegroom, and the wedding was a very quiet affair, both because the parties chiefly concerned wished it, and on account of Laura, who had come from Scotland to be with her cousin on the occasion and take leave of her. Lady Rosa Chumleigh was in an unusually amiable mood; she liked John Sandilands; she was very glad to get Julia disposed of; and since things had been so comfortably settled by the birth of her grandson, she had been on unusually good terms with providence—persons of her kind sometimes are affected in this way by what they feel to be an escape—and even disposed to let the colonel approach nearer to the realisation of his ideal, a quiet life, than he had ever done within his long but little varied experience. Julia looked very well, and was very happy in her quiet way, and John Sandilands had a piece of news to tell her when they had left Hunsford—it had been especially stipulated that he was not to tell her sooner—which would make her happier still. Sir Wilfrid's wedding-present to his friend was a splendid one: it was the coffee plantation. John was going out to manage his own property now. Sir Wilfrid had hit upon this conclusive and satisfactory method of redressing to a certain extent the inequality between his own lot and that of John Sandilands that had always been a puzzle to him.

"Considering that he has just married the only woman he ever wanted to marry, and that she is quite ideally suited to him, I'm inclined to think the weight has got into the other scale now," said Sir Wilfrid to himself a little ruefully, as he re-entered the house after he had speeded the happy pair on their way and done a little good-natured pottering with the colonel, and went in search of Laura.

He found her in the morning-room with Amabel. The infant was sleeping in his lace-bedecked cradle beside the hearth; and Sir Wilfrid was indulged with a peep at him. Then he and Laura began to talk, of the wedding and present matters first, then of the past; of the dark days at Nice, of Julia's arrival, of their journey back to

England, of the friends whom they left behind.

"If I had wanted reminding of it, which I certainly did not," said Sir Wilfrid, "I should have had it all brought before me by the sight of Miss Wells and Mrs. Monroe—"

"Miss Wells and Mrs. Monroe?"

"Yes. I saw them for a moment; it was only on the platform at Fontainebleau, as we went by; I put my head out of the carriage and waved my hat; but I can't tell whether they recognised me. Miss Wells looked just the same; Mrs. Monroe very wan and ill; it was only a glimpse, but I saw that, I am sorry to say. What accounts do you get of her?"

He paused, and glanced from Laura to Amabel. The former was staring at him in unmitigated astonishment; the face of the other was suffused with a peculiarly vivid sample of what Amabel called her "unfortunate blush."

"What have I said?" asked Sir Wilfrid.

"That you saw Mrs. Monroe with Miss Wells, on your way home with John. It is impossible."

"But I tell you I did see them; there is no doubt about it; I saw them as distinctly as I see you and Miss Ainslie."

"At what date was that, Sir Wilfrid?"

"The 15th of August."

"And Mrs. Monroe," said Laura solemnly, "died at Nice in June!"

"Died! Died in June! Mrs. Thornton, you must think me mad, if you will, but I most emphatically declare that I saw her, in her usual dress—the English widow's cap, I think, caught my eye first—standing beside Miss Wells on the platform at Fontainebleau. Pray don't doubt me; pray don't laugh at me; I tell you the exact truth."

"Laugh! I am not likely to laugh at such a thing. What can it mean?"

She put her hand to her brow for a moment and thought; the next she exclaimed:

"Amabel, it was Mrs. Dunstan! She has been with Miss Wells all this time! Rely upon it, it was she. Oh, Sir Wilfrid, you have found her!"

"Thank God!" said Amabel in her heart, while her tears fell silently; "thank God, she will be persuaded, she will come back; it will all come right; and yet she will know that I kept her secret as faithfully as she kept her promise."